

**Statement by Uri Rosenthal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**

**International Afghanistan Conference, Bonn**

5 December 2011

*[Road to Bonn]*

Ten years ago, international terrorists and extremists ruled Afghanistan. After the brutal terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 the world united in a mission to restore law and order in Afghanistan, reconstruct the nation and prevent Afghanistan from ever again becoming a haven for terrorism and extremism. On 5 December 2001, under the UN's leadership, Afghan leaders signed the Bonn Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions. The Bonn Agreement laid the foundation for a secure, stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan. Together with President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan population, the international community – led by the UN and NATO – embarked on a large-scale process of stabilisation and reconstruction. It was well understood that this process would require a long-term commitment of development aid, military capability and diplomatic skills.

Afghanistan had been ravaged by decades of conflict and was one of the poorest nations in the world. The Afghan people's expectations were fair and realistic. They asked that their country rejoin the international community of peace-loving nations. They wanted to live in a safe, secure environment, with a democratic central government that respected and guaranteed the most basic human rights. They demanded health care and education.

Since 2001 the Netherlands has been at the forefront of international reconstruction efforts. Our assistance has always been aimed at promoting Afghan ownership and for this reason we have consistently contributed to national development programmes such as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Together with Germany we commanded ISAF in 2003; between 2004 and 2006 we deployed a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghlan province; and between 2006 and 2010, the Netherlands was ISAF lead nation in Uruzgan. Since last summer the Netherlands has been running an integrated police training mission in Kunduz, which will continue supporting the transition process until 2014. To date, the Netherlands has invested almost three billion euros in Afghanistan.

Today in Bonn we can acknowledge that enormous progress has been made and that the Afghanistan of 2011 can in no way be compared with the Afghanistan of 2001. A democratic constitution has been adopted, national and provincial elections have been held, economic development has reached all Afghans, women are equal before the law, girls have returned to school and basic service delivery in education and health care has improved substantially. National Security Forces have been set up to guarantee a safe and secure environment in the future, and in just a few years Afghanistan will exercise full sovereignty over its own security.

But the mission is not yet complete – the progress is not yet irreversible. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest nations in the world and its national budget will continue to rely on international donor support for years to come. Governance capacity at central and local level still needs to grow and corruption needs to be tackled more effectively. The rule of law is still fragile and human rights – particularly of women and of religious and other minorities – need stronger protection. Extremists and terrorists still seek to reverse the progress that has been made, and their use of violence makes the security situation unstable.

*[Looking forward - transformation]*

At this conference in Bonn today, we not only take stock of what has been achieved so far, but also look ahead and discuss the requirements for a secure future in Afghanistan. The Netherlands considers it essential that both the current and future leaders of Afghanistan demonstrate effective and credible democratic leadership in order to ensure a stable and prosperous future. With increased Afghan ownership comes increased Afghan responsibility. Good governance is a key ingredient for success in Afghanistan. In the end, it is good governance that keeps terrorism and extremism away. A government must serve its people and take care of the basic daily needs and services. It must ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are protected and that there is a transparent criminal justice system for all. These issues decide whether people opt for democracy or extremism.

More Afghan leadership is needed in the field of governance, the rule of law and the fight against corruption. Structural reforms are needed to achieve our shared goal of a secure, viable and financially sustainable Afghanistan. Transition requires more than the development of effective security forces. The civilian aspects of transition are equally important. Ensuring responsive, transparent and accountable government at national and subnational level needs to be an Afghan priority. The Kabul conference in July 2010 initiated the Kabul process, providing the building blocks for this transformation process. Although some progress has been made, more concrete results are required. The agreement between the Afghan government and the IMF on a new three-year programme, including an important reform agenda, opens the way for the full implementation of all the Kabul commitments. The Afghan government needs to continue its work to strengthen the state and improve governance. The Netherlands calls on the government of Afghanistan to take up this challenge and lead the way.

The Netherlands also urges the Afghan government to work closely with Afghan civil society. Transformation requires the full support and involvement of all parts of society. Afghan civil society, including women and minority groups, need to be given credible opportunities to voice their opinions. The Netherlands welcomes the presence of civil society representatives at today's conference table, just as it welcomes the inclusive nature of the Afghan government's own delegation itself.

An inclusive approach is also essential for the peace process. The Netherlands believes that Afghan-led peace and reconciliation efforts deserve active international support. Only a political solution can guarantee long-term stability in Afghanistan. But a just and lasting peace can only be reached through an inclusive and open process. Any outcome must respect the three 'red lines' (renouncing violence, cutting ties with al Qa'ida, and respect for the Afghan constitution) and must not undo the progress made so far on development, democracy and human rights, including the rights of women and minorities. The Netherlands also firmly believes that peace must not lead to impunity for gross human rights violations.

Afghanistan's neighbours play a key role. Without their full support, peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved. So the Netherlands greatly welcomes the Istanbul Declaration and calls on neighbouring countries to continue supporting Afghanistan on its path toward stability and prosperity.

The wider international community must also continue to provide support and assistance – well after the security transition in 2014. The Netherlands stands ready to continue supporting Afghanistan, both in the current transition process and moving forward to transformational change. We are currently contributing through major development efforts and our integrated police training mission. This training mission is aimed at strengthening not only the Afghan civilian police but also the judicial sector, both at provincial level (Kunduz) and at national level (Kabul). We are currently exploring the possibilities to also train Afghan civil police for other Northern provinces. Together with the UN, the EU and NATO, the Netherlands will continue to support the security sector, the rule of law, good governance and socioeconomic development in Afghanistan, now and after 2014. With the full cooperation of the Afghan government, the Netherlands is committed to a long-term engagement so that we can further consolidate the progress made since the Bonn agreement of 2001, and all Afghans can finally enjoy lasting peace and prosperity.

Bonn, 5 December 2011